

A Discourse on the Lotus Sutra

Preface

The *Mahāyāna* Buddha Dharma is marvelous, extremely profound, extensive, and magnificent, and this one and only Wondrous Dharma of the Buddha Vehicle is unfathomable via speculation or academic research as it is beyond the state of mental consciousness. According to the Buddha, this is the inconceivable state of *Mahāyāna* liberation and is referred to as the knowledge-of-all-aspects belonging to the *Mahāyāna* Bodhi wisdom, which encompasses the four kinds of wisdom: **the grand perfect mirror wisdom**¹, **the perfect-achievement wisdom**², **the wisdom of wondrous observation**³, and **the wisdom of equality**⁴. However, this marvelous, profound, extremely vast, and magnificent Buddha fruition can be attained only after one commences the sequential cultivation following the initial realization of the *Mahāyāna* vision of reality on the causal ground.

The Path of Vision on the *Mahāyāna* path has three sequential stages: **the vision of reality**⁵, **the vision of characteristics**⁶, and **the proficiency stage**⁷. One who has just achieved the vision of reality is at **the Seventh Abiding stage**⁸. The vision of characteristics (i.e., aligning one's mind with the realized *tathāgatagarbha*) commences at the Seventh Abiding stage and is completed at the final Tenth Dedication stage. One will find oneself at the proficiency stage after one fully attains the wisdom and virtues at the stage pertaining to the vision of characteristics, takes advanced studies on the fruition of the *Mahāyāna* liberation through wisdom, and then further relies on **the superior intent of the ten inexhaustible vows**⁹. One can then be referred to as having the mind of entering-ground bodhisattva at the First Ground.

¹ C. 大圓鏡智

² C. 成所作智

³ C. 妙觀察智

⁴ C. 平等性智

⁵ C. 真見道

⁶ C. 相見道

⁷ C. 通達位

⁸ C. 七住位

⁹ C. 十無盡願的增上意樂

Sentient beings who can cultivate faith in the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, and *Samgha* (upon completing the 10 Faith stages) will enter the First Abiding stage and start to practice the bodhisattva's myriad six *pāramitās*, which are all necessary cultivations before awakening to the True Mind. One will enter the Path of Vision of Reality only after attaining awakening to the True Mind or realizing the reality-suchness; thereafter, one sequentially cultivates various dharmas on the Path of Vision of Characteristics until one attains total proficiency and can already enter the First Ground. Such a cultivation period will require one great *asaṃkhyā-kalpa*. Hence, it can be said that the difficulty of cultivating the Path of Vision on the *Mahāyāna* path is inconceivable.

The realization of the eighth *vijñāna* (consciousness), *tathāgatagarbha*, denotes truly realizing the *Mahāyāna* vision of reality, which will enable practitioners to directly observe its true and suchness self-nature. Thus, this is called “realizing the reality-suchness.” At this point, practitioners start to bring forth the **fundamental non-conceptual wisdom**¹⁰ and simultaneously realize the **intrinsicity, nature, purity, and nirvāṇa**¹¹. As such, bodhisattvas who enter the Seventh Abiding stage for the first time upon realization of *prajñā* with non-retrogression can continue their cultivations and enter the stage pertaining to the Path of Vision of Characteristics.

Having experienced the lengthy period consisting of 24 of the 30 parts of the first great *asaṃkhyā-kalpa* of cultivation involving simultaneously observing and contemplating that the myriad dharmas in the three realms are all brought forth and manifested by the wondrous nature of the reality-suchness of *tathāgatagarbha*, bodhisattvas can then verify the true teaching that “all three realms are mind-only, and all phenomena are *vijñāna*-only,¹²” as stated in the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*.

Throughout such advanced cultivations of the non-conceptual wisdom of subsequent attainment from observing the reality-suchness, practitioners will eventually complete the direct observation of the **unposited truths of the three varieties of mind**¹³ and the Tenth Dedication stage. Only then can practitioners fully acquire the notion of the **non-conceptual wisdom of subsequent attainment regarding the reality-suchness**¹⁴. At this point, practitioners have perfectly

¹⁰ C. 根本無分別智

¹¹ C. 本來自性清淨涅槃

¹² C. 三界唯心、萬法唯識

¹³ C. 非安立諦三品心

¹⁴ C. 後得無分別智

accomplished the functions and virtues of the Path of Vision of Characteristics but have yet to enter the First Ground.

To advance to the proficiency stage of the *Mahāyāna* Path of Vision and enter the First Ground, the continual practice of the *Mahāyāna* Four Noble Truths is mandatory. After directly observing **the sixteen and nine varieties of mind regarding the Four Noble Truths**¹⁵ and relying on the previously achieved meditative concentration of the first or second dhyana as support, practitioners can thus correspond to the fruition of liberation through wisdom. Alternatively, after completing the contemplative observation of this posited truth, practitioners can bring forth the first dhyana, thus confirming the attainment of the fruition of liberation through wisdom. At this time, they can realize *nirvāṇa* both remainder and remainderless *nirvāṇa*; only then can they associate their minds with the First Ground, but they still have yet to attain the stage of the First Ground.

Based on the ten great vows made and **retaining the afflictive hindrances to nourish future rebirths**¹⁶, practitioners will aspire, through the constant and unwavering extensive vows, to be born in the human world to save others and themselves. At this stage, through the **ten great endless vows**¹⁷ made, with no fear of the various sufferings of transmigration over future immeasurable eons, practitioners will bring forth the superior intent and thus enter the First Ground. Only this will meet the definition of the proficiency stage of the *Mahāyāna* Path of Vision. In other words, at this stage, the practitioners' minds are truly aligned with the attainment of entering the First Ground, completing all the necessary cultivation and realization of the *Mahāyāna* Path of Vision. By now, the practitioners have realized the full contents of the reality-suchness about the proficiency stage on the *Mahāyāna* Path of Vision, perfecting the requisite **wisdom of the acquiescence to the non-arising of dharmas**¹⁸, along with **the fruition of liberation through wisdom**¹⁹ and **superior intent**²⁰. As such, only then will the practitioners realize **the fruition of the acquiescence to the non-arising of dharmas**²¹ in the proficiency stage and will thus be named

¹⁵ C. 四諦十六品心及九品心

¹⁶ C. 起惑潤生

¹⁷ C. 十大無盡願

¹⁸ C. 無生法忍智慧

¹⁹ C. 慧解脫果

²⁰ C. 增上意樂

²¹ C. 無生法忍果

bodhisattvas who have entered the First Ground for the first time.

With such an initial realization of reality-suchness in the Path of Vision (on the *Mahāyāna* Bodhisattva Path), one brings forth the fundamental non-conceptual wisdom of reality-suchness and can enter the Seventh Abiding stage, becoming a **Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva of the Path of Vision of Reality**²². Subsequently, one moves to the Path of Vision of Characteristics, continues to observe the reality-suchness directly, and realizes the three varieties of mind of the unposited truth by going through long eons of cultivation of the ten Abiding, ten Practice, and ten Dedication stages. One will then fully attain the subsequently acquired non-conceptual wisdom and bring forth **the elementary portion of the acquiescence to the non-arising of dharmas of the First Ground**²³. Accompanied by the fruition of liberation, a vast number of virtues, and superior intent, one is then said to have fully mastered the Path of Vision of Reality-Suchness and can enter the First Ground.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned stages, the notion of reality-suchness realized therein is no other than the two natures belonging to the eighth *viññāna*—*tathāgatagarbha*, real and suchness—all subsumed under the norm of Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas realizing the reality-suchness. Accordingly, those who have not realized the reality-suchness are not *Mahāyāna* ones with a Path of Vision. That is, people who have realized the reality-suchness can witness the real and suchness self-nature manifested by *tathāgatagarbha* throughout activities. In the same way, the wisdom pertaining to *prajñā* of the ultimate reality and the intrinsicity, nature, purity, and *nirvāṇa* are all established based on the dharma nature of the reality-suchness of *tathāgatagarbha*. Thus, all dharmas are brought forth and manifested by the wondrous nature of the reality-suchness of *tathāgatagarbha*.

However, the realization of the reality-suchness has become a thing of the past in the last 300 years. Ever since the 5th Dalai Lama undermined the teachings of **Jonangpa**²⁴, the authentic Tibetan Buddhism, by means of political power, social upheaval was unseemly for wholesome mentors to propagate the Dharma. It was not until modern times that the situation has become peaceful and citizens have come to live and work in peace and with contentment; only then will wholesome mentors

²² C. 真見道菩薩摩訶薩

²³ C. 初地無生法忍之初分

²⁴ C. 藏傳佛教覺囊巴

reappear in the world and be able to continue to benefit those Buddhists who have an affinity with the Buddha.

Even for enlightened practitioners, after learning the aforementioned Dharma in the Dharma-ending era, entering the First Ground requires enduring work. This is because it is already extremely difficult to realize the reality-suchness in the Path of Vision of Reality, what more to cultivate the three minds regarding the unposited truth over long eons during the Path of Vision of Characteristics, not to mention to have someone who can correctly clarify them in detail to the four Buddhist assemblies. Furthermore, the one who teaches the intensive practices before entering the First Ground needs to fully realize the sixteen and nine varieties of minds regarding the posited truths of the *Mahāyāna* Four Noble Truths, etc. Thus, the following quote in the *Flower Garland Sutra*: “It is rare for a wholesome mentor to be born in the world and propagate the Dharma; it is hard to visit his place, meet him, learn from his knowledge, be close to him, live together with him, know his intent, and conform with his teachings.²⁵” These eight difficulties indeed fit perfectly into the current scenario of Buddhism in the Dharma-ending age.

Suppose one has already personally met such a wholesome mentor and has wholeheartedly learned from him for a long time. Does this mean that one will perfectly acquire the three varieties of minds regarding the unposited truth and the sixteen and nine varieties of mind regarding the posited truth to enter the stage of First Ground? After more than 20 years of helping practitioners, I have come to realize that helping liberate humans is difficult. This is because realizing the wisdom pertaining to the *Mahāyāna Path of Vision* of the Ultimate Reality is extremely difficult, let alone being fully proficient in it. Furthermore, the *Mahāyāna* fruition of liberation through wisdom cannot be achieved through self-cultivation in solitude in remote mountains. As such, initially seeing the Path (i.e., by enlightenment) and realizing the reality-suchness is immensely arduous, let alone carrying out continual practices after entering the First Ground. First, practitioners should attain the requisite **direct comprehension of being like images in a mirror**²⁶ upon the completion of the First Ground stage to be freed from the shackles of the six sense objects in the three realms. Then, upon completing the Second Ground, practitioners will attain **direct comprehension of**

²⁵ C. 「善知識者出興世難，至其所難，得值遇難，得見知難，得親近難，得共住難，得其意難，得隨順難。」《華嚴經》

²⁶ C. 猶如鏡像

being like light and shadows²⁷, based on their changing of their own **internally perceived portion**²⁸ at will, in accordance with their desired scope and time, to gradually eliminate their habitual seeds according to schedule. Prior to their completion of the Third Ground, bodhisattvas can change the internally perceived portion of other people by relying on the wisdom of acquiescence to the non-arising of dharmas. Upon completing this Ground, bodhisattva practitioners will attain a **direct comprehension of being like echoes in a valley**²⁹ and can observe their own mind-made bodies present elsewhere, in other worlds, to extensively help save sentient beings, thereby accelerating their attainment of acquiescence to the non-arising of dharmas and merits and virtues. Moreover, the various states of direct comprehension of the Fourth Ground' mind and beyond are even more inconceivable for bodhisattvas in the three stages of worthiness. Hence, the unenlightened, nominally called wholesome mentors, can only dreamily speculate about the reality-suchness in the Path of Vision of Reality realized by a Seventh Abiding bodhisattva.

Despite all odds, even if bodhisattvas have already entered the First Ground and wish to know the ultimate liberation and the state of the ultimate wisdom of the Buddha Ground, it is still beyond their reach as the First Ground bodhisattvas are incapable of speculating on or imagining the inconceivable liberation and wisdom of the Tathāgata. Even if bodhisattvas have reached the third great *asamkhyā-kalpa* period of their cultivation stage—having attained the Eighth Ground's initial mind—they will still be unable to fully comprehend the state of all buddhas. As a result, they will be unable to see the complete picture of the Buddha Dharma. Thus, they will not be able to understand the interconnections among all the Buddha-lands in the ten directions and three periods of time: the past, present, and future.

Given the aforementioned reasons, the World-Honored One intended the four Buddhist assemblies to truly understand that Buddhism has existed since the infinite past, continues to exist at present, and will continue to exist in the endless future; that Buddhism prevails in the boundless vast Buddha-lands in the ten directions; and that the myriad mundane and supramundane dharmas, the wisdom pertaining to the ultimate reality of *prajñā*, the wisdom of knowledge-of-all-aspects, and the wisdom of acquiescence to the non-arising of dharmas all belong to the wondrous nature of the reality-suchness of the eighth *viññāna*, *tathāgatagarbha*. Thus, He must propound

²⁷ C. 猶如光影

²⁸ C. 內相分

²⁹ C. 猶如谷響

the *Wondrous Dharma of Lotus Sutra* in the end to perfectly conclude the Dharma teachings of the generation. Therefore, when the World-Honored One propounded the *Lotus Sutra*, He consistently taught, as in the *Diamond Sutra*, about this very mind and repeatedly called the eighth *vijñāna* “this sutra,” hopefully to alert all Buddhist disciples to the need for them to awaken to and realize this principle, thereby abandoning the mundane or sound-hearer mind. If practitioners are willing to seek to realize the truth of the reality-suchness, they can eventually correctly and truly enter the inconceivable and wondrous *Mahāyāna* Dharma. Indeed, the World-Honored One bestows great mercy and compassion on sentient beings, beyond ordinary beings’ comprehension.

However, in the Dharma-ending age, some ordinary people and sound-hearers don *Mahāyāna* monastic robes but surprisingly follow academics in Japan, Europe, and America who specialize in scholarship and advocate the erroneous theory of the six consciousnesses. Using fallacious views similar to non-Buddhist eternalism and nihilism, these monks blatantly deny the *Mahāyāna* sutras and oppose the sacred Buddha teachings by stating that “*Mahāyāna* is not the Buddha’s teaching.” They dismissed the original teachings compiled in the four *Āgamas* and misconstrued them as sutras of the Path to Liberation under the theory of the six consciousnesses. The sacred teachings of the eight consciousnesses in the *Āgamas* were belittled publicly and made equal to the wrong views of the six consciousnesses theory advocated by non-Buddhist eternalists. The original intent of the World-Honored One, as elucidated based on the principle of the eight consciousnesses, has thus been distorted and has caused those pursuing the sound-hearer Path to Liberation to fall into the same views as the liberation propounded by non-Buddhist eternalism and nihilism. As such, the state of remainderless *nirvāṇa* becomes a nihilistic emptiness that no one can understand and realize.

Those who live in the Tathāgata’s house, wear the Tathāgata’s robes, nourish themselves with the Tathāgata’s food, and use the superficial appearance of promoting the Tathāgata’s Dharma to aggressively promote the semblance dharma in place of the true dharma of the sound-hearer Path to Liberation will inevitably eventually overthrow the true Buddha Dharma and replace it with the semblance dharma. Unfortunately, many such people are currently taking shelter in Buddhist communities as monastics and undermining the Buddha Dharma. Yet, various “masters” remain hypocritically in Buddhist communities, unwilling to face the serious fact that they are damaging the Buddha Dharma. They even make excuses and talk glibly about **coexisting peacefully** with those who destroy the righteousness of Buddhism to **maintain their fame and**

fortune. If we allow this phenomenon to continue, such a peculiar trend will hinder the renaissance of Buddhism in China and the promotion of Chinese Buddhist culture. Given the existence of such a peculiar trend, Pingshi has no choice but to explain the real meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* in detail, hoping to at least turn the tide.

Thanks to the joint efforts of many fellow practitioners, this book, consisting of 25 volumes, will be published. It explains in detail the World-Honored One's true teachings in the *Lotus Sutra* and is thus titled *A Discourse on the Lotus Sutra*. With this publication, it is hoped that the four Buddhist assemblies at large will relinquish their erroneous views, return to the wondrous, exquisite, and boundless True Dharma (*saddharma*) in their Buddhist cultivations, and strive to attain the realization of the eighth *vijñāna*.

The present and future four Buddhist assemblies will benefit from our dedication to restoring Chinese Buddhist culture and fending off the disintegration of other religious cultures. We hope that the True Dharma will spread widely and help Buddhists globally after a few decades; that China will eventually become the sacred land for the world's top cultural figures to take refuge in (the Three Jewels), and their spiritual motherland; and that such a revival of Chinese Buddhist culture will be universally recognized and, after around a hundred years later, would spread widely to all levels of European and American societies and finally benefit all people and heavenly beings. Hopefully, many practitioners will also be able to attain enlightenment and embark on a journey to spread the True Dharma. With the impending sequential publication and circulation of this book series, I hope that the true meanings of the teachings disclosed above will shine forth, which is my deep longing for the Buddha Dharma.

Buddha's son Pingshi

Early spring, 2015 AD

at Zhugui Mountain Residence